

## Forgiveness – The Missing Step

This is a discussion of forgiveness. First, we point out, as if you didn't already know, that alcoholics tend to feel victimized by people, places, things, and the cosmos in general. As if this were not enough, we alcoholics also carry a grudge about what has been done to us or not done for us.

In the paragraphs that follow, we explore the implications of carrying resentments around with us. If we cannot get rid of our resentments any other way, we are sometimes faced with the ultimate resentment eradication tool – to forgive those whom we resent. The nature of forgiveness is investigated, and finally, techniques to achieve forgiveness are presented. Our discussion of forgiveness is elaborated upon through links into four additional pages below. It is best, we think, that they be viewed in the order listed.

### Alcoholics are Resentment –Prone

Most alcoholics have a deep (almost pathological) sense of justice. If we are wronged (meaning often that we did not get what we wanted) or if we even conjure up the notion that we might have been wronged, we find full *justification* to express anger or harbor resentment. It then seems almost a duty to carry a justified resentment. Otherwise, those who have wronged us would get off scot-free. And that wouldn't be right, would it? So, we waste our God-given lives judging and punishing our fellows. Relinquishing a justified resentment is one of the most difficult experiences known to the alcoholic.

If you explore the origins of the resentment word in our dictionary you will find:

Resent has also been used in other senses that seem strange to us, such as “to feel pain” or “to perceive by smell.” The thread that ties the senses together is the notion of feeling or perceiving. Again.

For the alcoholic, resentment is a reliving of the offense that injured us in the first place. Think about it. We perceive that we are punishing that person for their wrong, when in fact, we are simply willing ourselves to feel the hurt again, and again, and again. Get the point? Resenting makes no more sense than our drinking did. Something is twisted in brainsville, we think.

### Methods of Resentment Removal

How are resentments removed? Here are the customary methods and they are presented in increasing order of difficulty (to the alcoholic, that is):

**Neglect.** Yes, benign neglect removes most of our thoughts of the day. We simply forget about things that are not important to us. As we grow in our sobriety we are less interested in harboring resentments and they follow a natural order of elimination, unless they are captured by our perverse habits.

**Reflection.** If we are aware of our resentment and, if we wish to get rid of it, we are wise to think about it.

Did we really hear what the other person said? Did they really say what they meant? Was what we heard just a rumor? Does the offending action fit a pattern, or might it have been a fluke? Was the offender in distress? Are we giving this person the benefit of the doubt? If not, why are we better off carrying resentment?

**Investigation.** Maybe we need more substantiation or facts? Is there independent verification of what happened? Have we mentioned to the potentially offending person that we are taken aback by their possible action and we would like to see if we understood correctly? Do the facts substantiate that we were really harmed on purpose? If not, why not just drop the whole thing?

**Benefit/Cost Analysis.** If there was a real harm, especially an intentional one, what is the benefit to us of carrying resentment? Should it be a big resentment? What should be its ranking among the other justified resentments we already have? Will its insertion into our resentment inventory mean we should discard a resentment of lesser injury? How long should we carry this resentment? Does it justify vengeance? Are we willing to suffer loss of friendship, destruction of property, expense, arrest, or social disfavor as a consequence of being judge, jury, and executioner? Would it simply be nicer to be rid of the resentment?

**Forgiveness.** Yes, it is possible to be rid of residual resentments through forgiveness. The reference links below will describe how this can be done. Here are a few pointers though:

**Anonymity.** The person you resent need not know of your resentment. In fact, it is much better and simpler if they do not know. A grudge nurtured in secret is much sweeter anyway.

**Privacy.** Unless the person whom you resent has asked for your forgiveness or, if you are absolutely certain that they will cherish your forgiveness, you should keep your forgiving private. It can be a gross

form of arrogance to approach another person in order to tell them that they are forgiven. Usually, they will have no idea of having committed an offense and they will wonder who the dickens you think you are forgiving them – God, perhaps?

**Finality.** Once you have forgiven another person the act is final. It need never be repeated nor should you permit the resentment to recur.

Of course, there is the old standby – prayer. After the discussion of each step in the Big Book, a number of methods to alleviate or remove problems are set forth. The persistent and fundamental tool "suggested" to us is prayer. Prayer should have been in the list above, but we didn't know how to rank it in order of difficulty. For some of us, prayer is the easy and natural tool for straightening out our lives. For others, it is an alien, even hostile, prospect. Whatever one's feeling about prayer might be, there should be steady effort to make it a primary ingredient in consciousness.

## What is Forgiveness

The Dictionary on FORGIVE

*for-give* (*fuhr giv'*) *v.* <-gave, -giv-en, -giv-ing>

1. to grant pardon for or remission of (an offense, sin, etc.); absolve.
2. to cancel or remit (a debt, obligation, etc.): to forgive the interest owed on a loan.
3. to grant pardon to (a person).
4. to cease to feel resentment against: to forgive one's enemies.
5. to pardon an offense or an offender.

## Who is the Keeper of Our Wrongs

There may be a bit of our personal theology here. If yours is different, please don't be offended. You might just be right.

When we commit an offense (or fail to fulfill an obligation), the wrong is recorded. The party(s) we have offended, if any, might keep score – most

people do. We also add to the bag of guilt, shame, remorse, and self-loathing that we haul around with us.

But the real recorder has been built into the system of the universe by its Creator. It is automatic and inevitable that all wrongs are recorded and the one and only thing that can remove them is amendment (correction or repair) of the wrong. Period.

In the East, they call this system Karma. In metaphysics, they might call it the Akasha. Whatever it is called and wherever it is located (most likely within us), it works, and it always works without fail, especially for we alcoholics, it seems (joke).

## Objectives of Forgiveness

Just who is being forgiven, and by whom?

**Forgiving others.** If an act of courtesy on our part will help others feel better about themselves, then perhaps we should let them know we have no negative feelings about their actions. But we should never believe that we can, in fact, interfere in their being forgiven in accordance with God's plan for them. Our beliefs and actions are not part of that plan.

**Being forgiven by others.** The same logic applies as with forgiving others. Cosmetic forgiveness between humans can be a compassionate act. However, genuine forgiveness is a very personal matter.

**Being forgiven by God.** God does not keep records nor does He carry grudges. The universal system of justice He has created takes care of correction and forgiveness automatically. He does not intervene. He simply loves us all the time.

## Forgiving ourselves

Just as humans cannot truly forgive each other, self-forgiveness is not possible, either. However, there is more to be said here. We assuredly agree that many, if not most, alcoholics know guilt, shame, remorse,

and self-loathing to excess. We **MUST** be rid of these before we can truly see the perfection of the Creator within ourselves as we are intended to do. We must also be enabled to look into the mirror and smile at the creature emerging from the slime of self-centered assertion into the service of the Father through his fellows. Knowing that we are forgiven is a requirement for the sober life.

The first thing to do is to clear away the false crimes of which we have convicted ourselves. A solid Step Five will produce a list of our defects of character and a preliminary list of persons we have harmed. If we feel bad about ourselves for anything not on these lists, the lists are either incomplete or we are caught up in the defect of senseless self-condemnation. Feeling bad about oneself, which might have been justified when we were doing our damage, is often an emotional hangover that needs to be discarded. You can create a self-respect (not pride) list. It might be next to the mirror and it might say, "I have cause to respect myself today because I have ... (list of good deeds, steps taken, persons helped, prayers, etc.)." But, be sure never to put yourself on your Step Eight list.

The second thing to do is to take Step Nine (after one thorough Step Eight with your sponsor, of course). Why? Because an amend is the **only** means of gaining forgiveness.

## Our "Right" to Forgive

We feel that when a wrong is committed there is an immediate creation of a record of the act. This record cannot be prevented NOR can it be eradicated through forgiveness. The injured party cannot remove the record, and God will not do so either, because He created the system of records in the first place. It works just fine for Him.

So, how are you and others absolved from our wrongs? You guessed it. Step Nine. Amendment (repair/correction) of the offense removes the record

automatically. Forgiveness plays no part whatsoever in absolution.

Why all this talk about forgiveness then? The fact is that we are not forgiving offenses against ourselves in the sense of removing the need for amendment on the part of the offender. That we cannot do. Only amendment can do that. Our act of forgiving is to clean out ourselves. That's right. We remove from ourselves the curse we have imposed upon ourselves to punish the offender. Our forgiveness absolves not their act but removes our own personal reaction to it.

Wow, what a concept! It is not their karma we correct, but our own!

Here are some additional sources we have found genuinely helpful. You might notice that some of them don't agree completely with what we have said. That doesn't make them, or us, wrong. It does make it necessary for you to dwell deeply upon your own convictions.